Does videofeedback make a difference?
New ABC and Beyond™ studies say “Yes!”

By Lauren Lowry, Hanen SLP and Clinical Writer

ABC and Beyond™ – The Hanen Program® for Building Emergent Literacy in Early Childhood Settings, is designed to help educators of preschool children (ages 3-5) promote emergent literacy naturally during daily activities. Educators learn strategies to promote the six building block of literacy:

• Oral language
• Vocabulary
• Story comprehension
• Language of learning
• Print knowledge
• Phonological awareness

What sets ABC and Beyond™ (and all of the Hanen programs) apart from many other forms of training and professional development is the inclusion of individualized coaching and videofeedback. Besides attending workshops full of important content, early childhood educators have an opportunity to practice strategies with the children in their care and receive immediate, individualized feedback. This videofeedback component requires:

• expertise
• time
• logistics
• funding

Given these requirements, it’s important to find out if videofeedback has added value when combined with workshops. Otherwise, why bother?!
The efficacy of the ABC and Beyond program™ has already been demonstrated in previous studies. But three new studies conducted by the University of Toronto in collaboration with The Hanen Centre aimed to tease out the specific impact of videofeedback on educators’ use of program strategies and children’s language. In order to do this, the researchers offered two versions of ABC and Beyond™, one that included only group sessions, and the other that included group sessions and videofeedback.

**Study Design**

All three studies used data from the same participants - 32 early childhood educators and 129 4-5 year old children from Toronto child care centres. At the beginning of the study, the educators were videotaped with a small group of children during a shared reading activity and a post-story craft/writing activity (during which educators were provided with paper, crayons, and pencils and asked to have the children draw their favourite part of the story on their paper). The children’s vocabulary, MLU, nonverbal IQ, letter naming, letter writing, and phonological awareness skills were also assessed.

The educators attended an ABC and Beyond™ program which included 21 hours of workshops (group sessions) offered in 4 sessions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of Sessions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Workshop 1: Building Literacy Through Conversation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn how to build literacy through actively engaging children in conversations and developing vocabulary during book reading. <em>(Content from sessions 1 and 2 in the ABC and Beyond Program)</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Workshop 2: Making the Story Come Alive** |
| Learn how to enhance children’s understanding of the story by asking stimulating questions and making the story come alive in play activities. *(Content from sessions 3 and 4 in the ABC and Beyond Program)* |

| **Workshop 3: Starting on the Road to Reading and Writing** |
| Learn to build children’s confidence in print knowledge, phonological awareness (how sounds are used in words), and early writing. *(Content from session 5 and 6 in the ABC and Beyond Program)* |

| **Workshop 4: Putting it All Together** |
| Review and consolidate all of the ABC and Beyond strategies in a variety of fun, interactive activities to foster children’s emergent literacy development. *(Content from session 7 in the ABC and Beyond Program)* |

© Hanen Early Language Program, 2015.
This article may not be further copied or reproduced without written permission from The Hanen Centre®.
The educators were assigned to either:

- **An experimental group** – these educators received the 4 workshops plus 5 sessions with coaching and videofeedback. Three of the videofeedback sessions occurred during the program, and the last two sessions occurred approximately two weeks and four weeks post-program.
- **A comparison group** – these educators received only the workshops (no coaching/video feedback)

Treatment fidelity was measured to ensure that programs (workshops and videofeedback) were delivered in a similar manner and in accordance with the ABC and Beyond™ Leader’s Guide.

Each of the three studies compared the impact of the two versions of the ABC and Beyond Program on the educators' use of specific strategies and the children’s performance in one of the following areas:

- **Interactive shared reading** (Rezzonico, Hipfner-Boucher, Milburn, Weitzman, Greenberg, Pelletier & Girolametto, 2015)
- **Vocabulary** (Namasivayam, Hipfner-Boucher, Milburn, Weitzman, Greenberg, Pelletier & Girolametto, 2014)
- **Print knowledge and phonological awareness** (Milburn, Hipfner-Boucher, Weitzman, Greenberg, Pelletier & Girolametto, 2015)

**Results**

- **Videofeedback made a difference with conversations during shared reading**

In the ABC and Beyond™ program, educators learn how to turn book reading into a conversation by asking children questions that draw on their experiences, provide explanations, and encourage children to predict what might happen next. They also learn how to respond to the children’s responses to these questions by elaborating on the children’s utterances. These types of conversations facilitate children’s vocabulary and use of more complex and decontextualized language.

When Rezzonico et al (2015) compared the educators’ shared reading with the children pre- and post-program, they noted that both groups of educators demonstrated longer conversations during book reading and included more children in the conversation. However, they noticed the following difference between the groups:

- **Educators in the experimental (videofeedback) group asked more experiential reasoning questions** – these types of questions make connections between the story and events in the children’s lives and introduce elements that are not necessarily in the text (e.g. “How do you feel when you lose your favourite toy?”)
And while increases were seen in both groups of children, the following differences were observed:

- Children in the experimental group responded more often to educators’ experiential questions
- Children in the experimental group used a significantly higher MLU in their responses to questions

Therefore, while improvements were noted in both groups during shared reading, videofeedback had a specific effect on the types of questions educators ask during shared reading and how children respond.

> **Videofeedback made a difference with vocabulary teaching strategies**

Five explicit vocabulary-teaching strategies to use during book reading are introduced in the ABC and Beyond™ program, including stressing the new word, showing what the word means, telling what the words means (definition), relating the word to the children’s personal experiences and knowledge, and repeating the word.

When Namasivayam et al (2014) compared the educators’ use of vocabulary-teaching strategies during shared reading pre- and post-program, they noted that both groups of educators and children increased their use of vocabulary-related talk. And while there wasn’t a statistical difference between the groups, there was a trend (medium effect size) that indicated the following difference between the experimental and control groups:

- Educators in the experimental group showed a greater increase in the number of vocabulary-teaching strategies they used

Examination of the specific strategies used revealed that:

- Educators in the experimental group used the “Relate” strategy most often – this strategy involves relating the word to the children’s prior experiences and knowledge, and is thought to increase the number of repetitions of a targeted word and produce a more solid word knowledge (Namasivayam et al, 2014).

But the most significant finding from this study related to the children:

- Children in the experimental group were more engaged in conversations about word meanings relative to the comparison group

The authors concluded that while “both forms of teacher training led to improvement in use of vocabulary teaching strategies and child vocabulary-related talk”… “children appeared to show greater benefit when they were taught by educators in the coaching condition” (Namasivayam et al, 2014, p. 354).
Videofeedback made a difference with print and phonological awareness references

The third study, by Milburn et al (2015), examined the effects of coaching on educators’ and children’s references to print and phonological awareness during a craft/writing activity. In the ABC and Beyond™ program, educators learn to engage children in conversations during which educators are encouraged to “Point out Print” (POP), use the “Listen…and Find one like it” strategy to focus children’s attention on syllables, rhyming words, and word-initial sounds, and the “Four S’s” to build letter-sound knowledge.

With regards to the educators, Milburn et al (2015) found that:

- **Both groups increased their print references** and there was no significant difference between groups. This may indicate that workshops alone are sufficient for educators to learn strategies related to fostering children’s print knowledge.
- **Educators in the experimental group used a higher quantity of phonological awareness references** – and this included more references to syllables, rhyme, and initial sounds

Upon examination of the children, they found that:

- **Children in both groups increased their print-related talk** – there was no significant difference between the groups at post-test
- **Children in the experimental group used significantly more utterances related to phonological awareness** – they engaged in more adult-child and child-child interactions during which they talked about producing rhyming words, counting syllables, and identifying words with the same sound.

The authors conclude that “phonological awareness is a cognitively complex metalinguistic insight that may require individualized coaching in order to provide educators with the depth of understanding and skill necessary for classroom implementation” (Milburn et al, 2015, p. 105).

**Videofeedback is worth it!**

Significant differences weren’t always observed between the two groups of educators in these studies – in some cases they improved to the same extent. This points to the fact that the group sessions were powerful and enabled all of the educators to grow significantly in their ability to promote emergent literacy skills.

But taken together, these studies demonstrate the added benefit of individualized coaching and videofeedback when combined with group sessions. This benefit was observed not only in the educators’ use of strategies, but in the resulting talk demonstrated by the children in their care.
Video feedback enabled educators to:

- ask more experiential reasoning (inferential) questions
- more effectively relate new vocabulary to children’s current knowledge and experiences
- make more references to phonological awareness

And video feedback had the following impact on children:

- more frequent responses to experiential questions
- greater MLU
- more frequently engaged in conversations about word meanings
- more utterances related to phonological awareness

Summarizing this added benefit, Milburn et al (2015) conclude:

“Although coaching may be more costly than other forms of professional development, if educators are able to adopt more sophisticated strategies...this may be a reasonable investment in preschool education given the impact of enhancing one educator’s practice on a number of children in his or her care” (p. 106).

Those of us who use video feedback have experienced its benefit first-hand. But the results of these studies provide us with great information to share with administrators and funding agencies who may question the extra investment in time, resources, and cost. Now you can say, without a doubt, video feedback makes a difference.

**References**


